

Alcohol Fact Sheet

Alcohol is a socially acceptable drug that has been consumed throughout the world for centuries. It is considered a recreational beverage when consumed in moderation for enjoyment and relaxation during social gatherings. However, when consumed primarily for its physical and mood-altering effects, it is a substance of abuse. As a depressant, it slows down physical responses and progressively impairs mental functions.

Signs and Symptoms of Use

- Dulled mental processes
- Lack of coordination
- Odor of alcohol on breath
- Possible constricted pupils
- Sleepy or stuporous condition
- Slowed reaction rate
- Slurred speech

(Note: Except for the odor, these are general signs and symptoms of any depressant substance.)

Health Effects

The chronic consumption of alcohol (average of three servings per day of beer [12 ounces], whiskey [1 ounce], or wine [6 ounce glass]) over time may result in the following health hazards:

- Decreased sexual functioning
- Dependency (up to 10 percent of all people who drink alcohol become physically and/or mentally dependent on alcohol and can be termed "alcoholic")
- Fatal liver diseases
- Increased cancers of the mouth, tongue, pharynx, esophagus, rectum, breast, and malignant melanoma
- Kidney disease

- Pancreatitis
- Spontaneous abortion and neonatal mortality
- Ulcers
- Birth defects (up to 54 percent of all birth defects are alcohol related).

Social Issues

- Two-thirds of all homicides are committed by people who drink prior to the crime.
- Two to three percent of the driving population is legally drunk at any one time. This rate is doubled at night and on weekends.
- Two-thirds of all Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related vehicle accident during their lifetimes.
- The rate of separation and divorce in families with alcohol dependency problems is 7 times the average.
- Forty percent of family court cases are alcohol problem related.
- Alcoholics are 15 times more likely to commit suicide than are other segments of the population.
- More than 60 percent of burns, 40 percent of falls, 69 percent of boating accidents, and 76 percent of private aircraft accidents are alcohol related.

The Annual Toll

- 24,000 people will die on the highway due to the legally impaired driver.
- 12,000 more will die on the highway due to the alcohol-affected driver.
- 15,800 will die in non-highway accidents.
- 30,000 will die due to alcohol-caused liver disease.
- 10,000 will die due to alcohol-induced brain disease or suicide.
- Up to another 125,000 will die due to alcohol-related conditions or accidents.

Workplace Issues

- It takes one hour for the average person (150 pounds) to process one serving of an alcoholic beverage from the body.
- Impairment in coordination and judgment can be objectively measured with as little as two drinks in the body.
- A person who is legally intoxicated is 6 times more likely to have an accident than a sober person.